

*This Week's Federal Court Decision Puts a Halt on Stem Cell Research, Suspends Obama Presidential Order that Allowed Embryonic Stem Cell Research*

Cold Spring Harbor, NY— Friday, Congressman Steve Israel (D-Huntington) joined with stem cell advocate Brooke Ellison and Dr. Bruce Stillman, President of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory to call for swift passage of legislation to allow federal funding of embryonic stem cell research to continue. This week a federal judge halted federal funding for embryonic stem cell research arguing that current law prohibits the use of such money for work in which an embryo is damaged or destroyed.

Rep. Israel said, "While the courts haggle over legalese, there are millions of families waiting on the great promise of stem cell research. For those living with a condition that could benefit from stem cell research, this is not an academic discussion, they are just losing time. We need to move quickly to pass legislation that gives doctors and scientists the tools they need to fight diseases like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, cancer, and spinal cord injuries."

Stem cell research advocate Brooke Ellison said, "An issue like stem cell research demands our concern, and a decision like Judge Lamberth's demands our action. Now more than ever, we need congressional legislation, so that decisions like that made by Judge Lamberth can no longer derail the necessary path to treatment and cures."

"Stem cell research has significant potential, but is still in its earliest stages," said Dr. Bruce Stillman, President of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory. "Embryonic stem cell research offers the best hope for current research if we are to move forward and fully realize the potential of stem cells in helping people afflicted with diseases or disorders that are today incurable."

On Monday, U.S. District Judge Royce Lamberth ruled that embryonic stem cell research enabled by President Obama in an executive order violates the intent of Congress in legislation that bans federal financing for any "research in which a human embryo or embryos are destroyed, discarded or knowingly subjected to risk of injury or death."

One of President Obama's first actions upon taking office was to overturn the standing Bush Administration policy, policy restricting federal financing for research only to the 21 cell lines known to exist on Aug. 9, 2001. Obama's policy permitted federal funds to be used for research on those lines as well as newer lines grown from embryos, but only allowed the use of embryos that would otherwise be discarded, and the federal funding could not pay for the actual destruction of the embryo.

Scientists see great promise in stem cell research, hoping that it could lead to cures or treatments from a slew of diseases and conditions. Some of the most promising come in cancer, Alzheimer's disease and multiple sclerosis.

Congress has twice passed legislation to clarify restrictions on stem cell research, but President Bush vetoed both measures. Congressman Israel has sponsored bi-partisan legislation that would codify the Obama executive order, allowing the research to go forward.

Dr. Bruce Stillman is President of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory. He has been Director of the Cancer Center at Cold Spring Harbor since 1992, a position he still holds. In 1994, he succeeded Dr. James D. Watson as Director of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, and was appointed President in 2003.

Brooke Ellison is the founder of the Brook Ellison Project, a non-profit organization created to educate on and mobilize public support for stem cell research. A 1990 car accident left her paralyzed from the neck down and dependent on a ventilator. She went on to graduate from Harvard, run for the NY State Senate and now advocates for stem cell research. Her story became the subject of the late Christopher Reeve's final movie, "The Brooke Ellison Story."